

NEWSRelease

Bureau of Land Management • BIFZ

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Burns Interagency Fire Zone • <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/burns/fire>

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BURNS INTERAGENCY FIRE ZONE URGES CAUTION TO AVOID WILDFIRES

HINES, Oregon – Warm weather, holiday weekends, and the end of the school year make getting outside a top choice for Harney County residents and visitors. However, the increase in public land users and a fast approaching wildfire season could be a dangerous combination if visitors aren't careful with fire this summer.

Burns Interagency Fire Zone (BIFZ) Fuels Operation Specialist Kim Valentine says, "Nationwide, 75% of all wildfires are human caused. We don't want to add to this statistic here in Harney County."

With a long, snowy winter and heavy snow pack, it seems moisture levels would be up across the landscape. Valentine continues, "Don't be fooled. We did get a lot of snow this year, but we've also had steady winds and conditions on the ground are much drier than expected. Fuels in the lower elevations are ready to burn."

In early April, BIFZ firefighters worked the first wildfire of 2008, an escaped prescribed burn on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. This past weekend, firefighters tackled 4 more fires, all in the Yellowjacket Lake area. Three incidents are of suspicious nature and are still under investigation. The largest, a one-quarter acre fire, was right inside the campground and suspected to be from an abandoned campfire. While restrictions regarding campfire use on public lands are not yet in effect for Harney County, the possibility is just around the corner.

Though usually accidental, human caused fires endanger communities, cost taxpayers millions of dollars every year to suppress, and can cause long-term damage to the environment. As a reminder, public land users should never leave a campfire unattended and always drown a fire with water and dirt when leaving the site. Even a slight breeze can quickly cause a campfire to spread beyond a fire ring or an area clear of flammable material.

Valentine added, "Along with abandoned campfires, cigarettes, spark arresters and fireworks add to the number of human caused fires we deal with. Carrying a shovel and extra water in case of an accidental start, and leaving any fire cool to the touch is the best advice to follow to avoid starting a wildfire yourself."

In the BIFZ, fire danger is low and the Industrial Fire Precaution Level is a level 1.

For more information on wildfire activity, public use restrictions or regulated fire closures, call the Burns Interagency Communication Center at (541) 573-4545.

